

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

APRIL 2008

FOUR DOLLARS





Bob Duncan
Director



Bob Duncan

Since being named executive director of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries on February 6, I have been overwhelmed and encouraged by the positive response from sportsmen and women, our conservation partners, individuals, employees, and readers of *Virginia Wildlife*. Working for the Department for the past 30 years has been a labor of love and the fulfillment of a lifelong dream.

Having been raised in southwest Virginia hunting groundhogs and squirrels—because back then there just weren't many deer and turkey—I felt honored to be hired as a district biologist in 1978. It was a privilege to work beside folks who became legends in wildlife restoration work. Those colleagues demonstrated that effective wildlife management means putting the resource first and taking proactive measures based on sound science. We embrace those same principles today. And those fine folks have become more than co-workers; they have become family.

Despite recent difficult years, the Department remains a family of professionals who have dedicated their lives and careers to putting Virginia's natural resources first. As we look to the future, however, there is plenty that needs doing. Our recent announcement to ini-

tiate a statewide quail study is a prime example. I am here to assure you that we will be focused on doing the right things, the right way.

One of the first steps we've taken is to improve communications and relationships with our partners. You can expect some changes ahead as we strive to be a more open and responsive agency.

At the same time, we are working to more efficiently deliver services to all hunters, anglers and outdoor enthusiasts. We also face costly upgrades to our aging hatcheries, dams and other facilities, while maintaining 37 wildlife areas, public lakes and boat landings in order to provide safe, quality recreation. Those challenges will have to be addressed.

Thinking about these things, I am reminded that as a youngster growing up in southwest Virginia a lot of my heroes were cowboys. Admittedly, most were products of the silver screen, but they rode hard, shot straight, and were respected for the good they did. That theme is mentioned by respected conservationist Jack Ward Thomas, who wrote several years ago on behalf of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation that they "rode for the brand" in true cowboy form. Well, like those cowboys of old I am proud to ride for the DGIF brand!

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.

Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

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Timothy M. Kaine, Governor

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About the cover:

Pictured is Joan Cone with husband Art, during a fishing excursion on Lake Moomaw in the Alleghany Highlands about four years ago. We are deeply saddened by Joan's recent death.

Joan was the consummate game connoisseur, and her recipes graced the pages of this magazine for more

than 20 years. Her son Art describes her "... passion in everything she accomplished to the best of her many natural abilities and talents." And Joan's talents were many! A writer and spokesperson in the field of fish and game cooking, Joan Coan was viewed as a "trailblazer" in this cuisine. She was an expert marksman, hunter and angler, and shared these pursuits with her husband of nearly 58 years.

We shall miss her contribution to *Virginia Wildlife* and her vibrant presence in our world. ©Dwight Dyke

Virginia Wildlife welcomes new editor Sally Mills to our staff!

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

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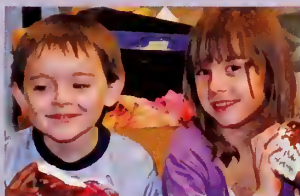
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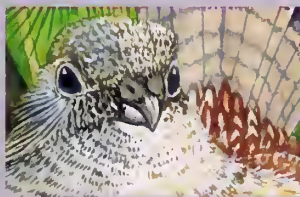
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OPENING DAY IS FOR

Graves Mountain Lodge and the Rapidan Chapter of Trout Unlimited join forces for a Kids Fishing Heritage Day.

by Tee Clarkson

At the age of nine I somehow got it in my head that I wanted to learn how to fly fish. I was fortunate that my father did not dismiss the idea as another fleeting notion like my previous dabbling in trapping and taxidermy, but instead purchased me an inexpensive rod and reel combo from the local tackle store. I struggled to teach myself to cast but stuck with it, and before long I was consistently catching bluegill and bass on popping bugs in the farm ponds we frequented nearly every weekend. At the time I never could

have imagined the six years I would later spend as a trout guide from Colorado to Chile, and how much fly fishing would shape my life.

Little did I know, but at roughly the same time I began my fly fishing career 25 years ago, the Rapidan Chapter of Trout Unlimited initiated what was the first and is now the longest running kids fishing day in Virginia. Graves Mountain Lodge and the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries have been involved with the kids day since its inception, and the three entities have worked to grow the event over the years. By combining the celebrating of Heritage Day with the kids fishing day, this year's event stands to be the greatest ever.

"The focus of the day will be to acquaint children with the thrill of catching trout," says Marcia Woolman from the Rapidan Chapter of TU, "but it will also teach about the environment in which trout live and other conservation issues."

When Virginia went from a specified trout fishing season to a year-round stocking program and season,



Lee Walker

the actual "opening day" disappeared. In an effort to keep the feel and excitement of opening day alive, Heritage Day was created. The day offers an opportunity to honor the beginning of one's own angling year, an opportunity to get out with the family and celebrate the outdoors and the art of trout fishing.

With this in mind, Graves Mountain Lodge will hold its annual kids fishing day in partnership with the Rapidan Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the VDGIF on the April 5th, 2008 Heritage Day. Located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains near

Along with plenty of angling action, kids get a boost from families, friends and numerous VDGIF conservation police officers, including Jason Culbertson (pictured left), on hand to lend support. Most kids who participate get to go home with at least a few, great tasting rainbow trout.



Lee Walker

KIDS!

Syria, Virginia, the working farm and lodge offer a perfect location for teaching fly fishing. With nearly a mile of private, stocked water on the Rose River, kids will have plenty of room to spread out and learn or hone their fly fishing skills. Members of the Rapidan, Thomas Jefferson and Northern Shenandoah Valley chapters of Trout Unlimited will be on-site to assist young fishermen with fly casting and fishing techniques.

"We're trying to get a lot of people involved for both a fishing and an educational experience," says Jimmy Graves, owner of Graves Mountain Lodge. With this in mind there are more than just basic fly casting and fishing opportunities available for visitors: Harry Murray will give a 45-minute lecture on fly fishing. Virginia Tech, Soil and Water, DEQ, the Department of Forestry, the Virginia Wildlife Center from Waynesboro, Virginia State University, and the VDGIF will all have booths, providing exhibits ranging from saltwater fish tanks to live snakes.

"It's going to be a fun day, an educational day," says Graves.

There are plenty of family activities like hiking, hay rides and a farm education program for those who wish to take a break from the water. The lodge is available for people who would like to stay the night, and camping is also available on-site.

The private water on the Rose is open all day for kids, starting at 9 a.m. Parents are welcome to take part in fly casting instruction, entomology lessons, and hands-on fly tying demonstrations. Nearby sections of the Rose and Rapidan rivers also provide ample water for parents who wish to wet a line.

So if there is a youngster out there somewhere, tugging at a pants leg, begging to learn to fly fish, this is the perfect opportunity to take advantage of a wealth of knowledge and generous people wishing to get kids involved in a sport they love. It just might provide the experience that shapes the life of a young angler.

For more information on Graves Mountain Lodge and the Kids Fishing Day, check out www.gravesmountain.com.

Tee Clarkson is an English teacher at Deep Run High School in Henrico County. In the summer he runs Virginia Fishing Adventures, a fishing camp for kids. Contact him at: tsclarkson@virginiafishingadventures.com. Tee is also a member of the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association, Inc.



Lee Walker



Lee Walker

Mark your calendar for Saturday, April 5th to attend this wonderful family event.

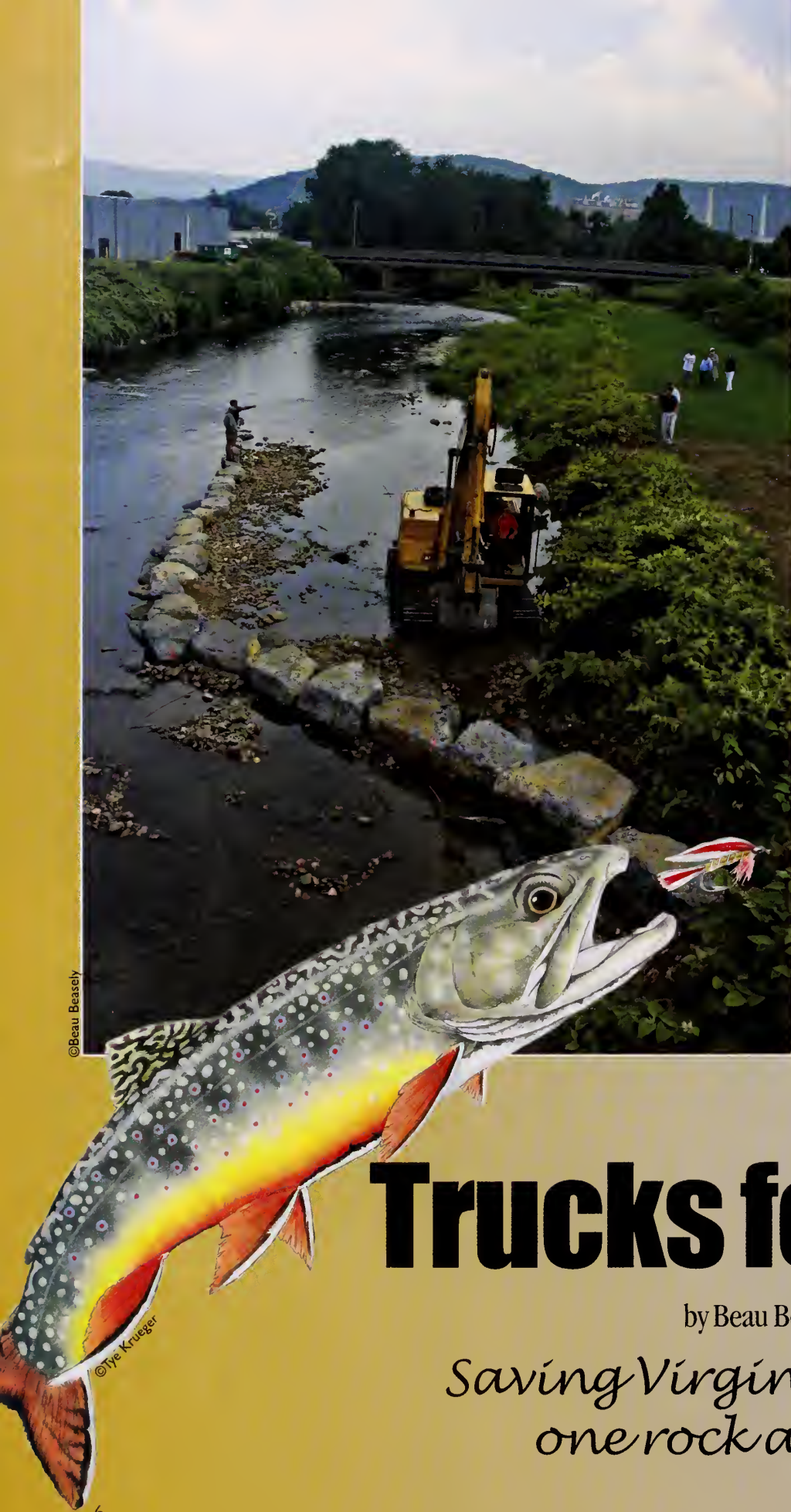


Lee Walker

Like most 3-year-old boys, my son is in love with two things: fire trucks and construction equipment. He gets his fill of both because his daddy is a firefighter and we live in Northern Virginia, where bulldozers nearly outnumber people. Now I, by contrast, can take or leave a truck, but a trout stream gets my pulse racing. So when I heard about restoration work on Happy Creek, an urban trout stream in Front Royal, I realized that the project had all of the makings of the ultimate father-son outing: a truck in a trout stream.

Jim Hart of the Northern Shenandoah Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited had alerted me to the Happy Creek project, a joint effort between his chapter and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF). I hoped to capture the project on camera, but moving water, my toddler and a backhoe seemed like a potentially lethal combination. And then the answer came to me: the toddler backpack. He'd be safe and secure, and I'd have both hands available for my camera.

At the river I pulled on a pair of waders and boots. Then I set my son into the backpack and carefully "backed in" to the pack, settling him securely on my shoulders. We made our way down to the stream this way, where I was met by some ill-disguised snickers from the retired members of Jim's TU chapter. They let me know in no uncertain terms



©Beau Beasley

©Tye Krueger

Trucks for Trout

by Beau Beasley

*Saving Virginia's streams
one rock at a time.*



©Jim Hart



©Beau Beasley

For author Beau Beasley (right) the revitalization of Happy Creek in Front Royal means better trout days ahead. For young son Jeremiah, it's all about big trucks and bulldozers! Happy Creek is just one example of the valuable partnership between VDGIF and the many Trout Unlimited chapters who have joined forces to restore the state's cold water fisheries.

that this "modern dad" scenario would not have played well in their day.

As we approached the bank, my son Jeremiah let out a blood-curdling yelp approximately six inches from my left ear: "Backhoe, Daddy! Daddy, backhoe!!" he shouted, bouncing up and down in the backpack and nearly toppling me in the

process. A tractor trailer had pulled into the parking lot alongside the stream, and within moments a backhoe was midstream, moving around rocks larger than my car with apparent ease.

Overseeing the placement of each and every boulder was Larry Mohn, fisheries biologist for the VDGIF and perhaps the Old Domin-

©Jim Hart

More Information

Want to learn more about how Trout Unlimited and the VDGIF are working together to improve cold water fisheries? Then don't miss the Virginia Fly Fishing Festival, held each spring on the banks of the South River in Waynesboro. Half of all event proceeds go toward conservation work in Virginia. The 8th annual Virginia Fly Fishing Festival will be held on April 19-20 and nearly 100 vendors will be on hand to teach you everything you ever wanted to know about fly fishing and trout conservation. Major sponsors of the event include the city of Waynesboro, Orvis and Dominion. For a complete list of sponsors and a schedule of events, see www.vafly-fishingfestival.org.

ion's foremost authority on trout. Today he was up to his knees in the stream, laying out survey stakes to plot the stones' course. The rocks would serve to protect the stream from erosion and provide habitat for the stream's resident population of trout. My son and I watched in rapt attention as Mohn signaled the backhoe operator, who placed each stone as carefully as if he were laying the foundation of a home. And in a sense, this is exactly what he was doing—except that the home belonged to the fishes.

Building trout streams—or, more accurately, preserving trout streams



for public use—has long been a goal of VDGIF. The Department and its partners, including the state's many Trout Unlimited chapters, have quietly and consistently worked to improve the habitat of the state's cold water fisheries. Happy Creek is one example; there are many others.

Last summer I observed a similar restoration project on the South River in Waynesboro, just 20 minutes west of Charlottesville. The streamside looked like a city planning meeting: City manager Doug Walker, city attorney Bob Lunger, and a handful of community business leaders spent the lunch hour witnessing the restoration of their local river. Like Happy Creek, the South River project is a joint effort between the VDGIF and the Shenandoah Valley Chapter of TU to restore rock structures to the river. TU member and hydrologist Urbie Nash, who travels the world to consult on water projects, donated his time (just as his fellow TU members did) to the project in his home river.

"Each river has its own personality and temperament," Nash says. "We really can't change the course of the river as much as we think. Rivers have a particular bent, and short of putting up a dam, you're not going to change their direction. Our hope is to help the river recover some of its natural flow by putting in piles of rock, which the river's current will then subtly move into place."

"Just look at that rock formation," says an excited Doug Walker, directing my attention to a small jetty that Nash and the backhoe operator had just created.

"Fifty years from now when you and I are dead and gone, children will still be able to fish in this river because of improved habitat."

Yes, the truck in the trout stream was great fun for father and son. But it is even more exciting to think that many years from now, my son will be able to take *his* son to fish around the rocks that we watched the backhoe place in Happy Creek. ■

Beau Beasley (www.beaubeasley.com) is a career captain with Fairfax County Fire and Rescue and the author of *Fly Fishing Virginia*.



©Beau Beasley



©Dwight Dyke

Fisheries biologist Larry Mohn places survey markers that will guide the placement of rocks and stones. Ultimately, this hard work results in a quality fishery for thousands of Virginia anglers.

Franklin's Blackwater Landing



A new boat landing in Franklin is the result of a cooperative effort where every outdoor enthusiast benefits.

story and photos
by Marc N. McGlade

On September 16, 1999, Hurricane Floyd came through Franklin, Va., and all but obliterated the region. The residents of Franklin and Southampton County will never forget the aftermath of that natural disaster. Life is precious and sometimes short, and there are times with our busy lives that we forget just how fragile our corner of the world can be.

During the “high-water mark,” so to speak, the only way to travel through Franklin was in a boat. It was simply indescribable. Many towns suffering such a disaster would pack it in and call it a day. Not Franklin. Not even close.

Downtown Franklin was submerged under as much as 12 feet of water as the Blackwater River raged and swelled to a new, history-making crest of 26.4 feet. The hurricane flooding caused the submersion of 182 businesses and 150 homes, located primarily in the downtown area.

Fast forward to 2008. Although some businesses closed or left Franklin after the hurricane and subsequent flood in October 2006, the downtown area is back. So is the Blackwater River.

Jeff Turner (left), the Blackwater-Nottoway Riverkeeper, hoists a bowfin from the Blackwater River in Franklin.



The Blackwater Landing

The Blackwater River originates south of Petersburg and is 105 miles long. The Blackwater joins the Nottoway River (155 miles long, beginning in Nottoway County) to form the Chowan River at the Virginia-North Carolina state line. This area is rich with wildlife, fish and game. Previously, there were no areas where the public could gain safe and legal boating access to the Blackwater River in or near the city of Franklin.

Thanks to a cooperative effort, that is now a thing of the past and a new, state-of-the-art boating facility greets boaters in downtown Franklin.

According to James Adams, the Capital Programs Director at the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF), this project involved all construction necessary to build a double-lane, 32-foot-wide reinforced concrete boat launching facility, complete with an access road and parking lot.

The new boat landing on the Blackwater River consists of two slot ramps and provides over 60 parking spaces.

"The total length of the concrete boat ramp is approximately 60 feet and provides boating access to the Blackwater River," Adams says.

"Two 6-foot-wide handicapped-accessible courtesy piers with gangways measuring approximately 54 feet and 'L' heads flanking both sides of the double-lane boat ramp (31 feet long) assist boaters in boarding their boats."

A parking lot was designed to accommodate 35 vehicle-trailer parking spaces, including two handicapped vehicle-trailer spaces. The parking lot also includes six vehicle



Franklin's Blackwater Landing was a cooperative agreement between the City, VDGIF, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, where outdoorsmen and women are the benefactors of a top-notch facility.



Jeff Turner, the Blackwater-Nottoway Riverkeeper, volunteers his time to patrol the rivers and keeps an eye on people who may pollute or otherwise take advantage of these beautiful waterways.

parking spaces, of which two are designated for handicap use.

"Also included," Adams adds, "is temporary parking for four vehicle-trailers near the head of the boat ramp to provide for boat preparation and staging activities. Drive lanes, a

maneuvering area and a boat launching staging area are provided at the head of the boat ramp."

Seventy-five percent of the funding for this project came from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Sport Fish Restoration Fund.

"The remaining 25 percent came from the city of Franklin," Adams explains. "Working with the city of Franklin was an excellent experience. They have great leadership and the public will benefit from our partner-

ship. VDGIF provided technical and administrative support and we entered into a cooperative agreement for the life of the project."

He says the site of Blackwater Landing is approximately nine river miles downstream of the VDGIF's Joyner's Bridge Landing (Isle of Wight County), and approximately 13.5 river miles upstream of the confluence of the Blackwater River and the Nottoway River at the Virginia-North Carolina state line.

"The goal was to provide safe, legal and adequate public boating access to the Blackwater River and afford boaters and recreational freshwater anglers the opportunity to access a section of the river that was previously underutilized," Adams says.

The entire site spans 6.58 acres. The Department holds conservation easements with the county to provide public boating access at this location. This facility required the submission of a Joint Permit Application for review and approval by various local, state and federal regulatory agencies. This project was approved by the appropriate environmental regulatory agencies, and permits were in place for its construction.

What it Means to Local Officials

"Our new boat ramp creates new opportunities for recreation in our city, giving boaters and fishermen immediate access to the beautiful Blackwater River," says Jim Council, the mayor of Franklin. "Access to the river in the city brings more people into town, opening up great opportunities for more enjoyable entertainment and economic development. We are excited about the ramp access and all the potential that it brings. Thanks to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, we have a first-class facility."

Other city officials agree. Rowland "Bucky" Taylor, the city manager of Franklin says there is no doubt about it; people are happy beyond expectations. Anglers, boaters, hunters and other recreational users now

For More Information

- ◆ For fisheries information and regulations regarding the Blackwater River, contact the VDGIF's regional office in Charles City at (804) 829-6580, or go online to www.huntfishva.com or www.dgif.virginia.gov.
- ◆ To learn more about the Blackwater-Nottoway Riverkeeper Program visit www.blackwaternottoway.com or call Jeff Turner at (757) 562-5173 or (757) 377-7606. Turner's e-mail address is blknatkpr@earthlink.net.
- ◆ *The Blackwater, Nottoway and Meherrin Rivers Atlas* is the map of choice for the Blackwater River. With the assistance of Jeff Turner, the Virginia Canals & Navigations Society produces this comprehensive guide booklet. Its illustrations and history help both first timers and seasoned anglers appreciate these beautiful rivers. To purchase a copy, contact the Blackwater-Nottoway Riverkeeper Program (information listed above) or contact VC & NS, at (540) 463-6777, dunoon@intelos.net or c/o Richard Davis, 4066 Turnpike Road, Lexington, VA 24450.
- ◆ The Blackwater Landing is open 24 hours a day, year-round.



The Blackwater River in Franklin is very scenic and full of history, fish, wildlife and more.

have a section of the Blackwater River open to a larger variety of boats to fish, to enjoy the natural environment along the river and to just cruise with family and friends—sharing times that they will always remember.

“The Blackwater Landing is a tremendous asset to the city, as it enhances our recreational opportunities and will host several fishing tournaments and similar events throughout the years ahead,” Taylor adds.

“We feel we have been blessed by the partnership between the federal, state and local efforts that went into making this dream a vibrant reality

for us. We can never say thank you enough, but our gratitude is certainly forever.”

The Blackwater River Fishery

Navigating by boat on the Blackwater River is a joy. This scenic waterway is a perfect venue for canoes, johnboats, bass boats and other recreational watercraft. However, with cypress trees and occasional underwater logs and trees, boaters must exercise caution, particularly when venturing upriver from the landing.

According to fisheries biologists, the dark, tannin-stained waters of the Blackwater River host runs of striped bass, river herring (alewives and

blueback) and American and hickory shad in the spring. Angling for red-breast sunfish (also known as red throats or red robins) also is quite good in the spring. This waterway has largemouth bass, bluegill, crappie, flier and chain pickerel populations. Hard-fighting bowfin and gar are common in the Franklin area. The possibility exists to land a trophy bowfin weighing 10 pounds or more.

Cypress trees line much of the shoreline in the area, meaning the “knee” or “donut” of the tree’s root system provides ample hiding spots for many of the river’s inhabitants.

This river offers a sight not often seen in the Old Dominion. There is some Spanish moss dotting a few trees along the shoreline slightly downriver from Franklin. With the swamps, cypress trees, Spanish moss and aquatic grasses and vegetation, the river is reminiscent of the Old South in its look and feel.

Blackwater-Nottoway Riverkeeper Program

The Blackwater-Nottoway Riverkeeper Program (BNRP) is a non-profit environmental organization dedicated to protecting and preserving the Blackwater and Nottoway rivers and their watershed. This program is entirely funded by private donations and membership dues.

Jeff Turner of Franklin has been caring for the Blackwater and Nottoway rivers unofficially since his early days of boating and fishing on them. However, Turner “officially” started this program in the spring of 2000. A big responsibility comes with the job title of riverkeeper: Turner is the eyes and ears of both rivers.

While Turner says it is true that there is another boat landing a few miles upriver from Franklin, boaters cannot make the passage by river from landing to landing.

“That’s one of the reasons the new Blackwater Landing was so important, because it’s the only good or usable (by big boats) ramp on the entire lower end of the river,” he says.

Of the many admirable aspects of Turner’s role, one especially stands



Serving as "riverkeeper," Turner often finds himself picking up trash left behind by others.



During his patrols Jeff Turner often comes across Spanish moss, a signature of the Blackwater-Nottoway system.

out: that he did this on a voluntary basis—without pay—for seven years! Through his concern, dedication and devotion to the rivers, it is safe to say they are in better shape than before he came on board. He reinforces the program's mission, which is simple: protect and improve the quality of the Blackwater and Nottoway watershed and serve as "defenders of the rivers."

Turner patrols the two rivers during the day and night, oftentimes camping and living on the water for three-day stretches throughout the year. During these patrols, he reports

problems that he observes to proper authorities. He removes more than one ton of trash and man-made debris each year!

Turner, 48, became the first riverkeeper in the Commonwealth and the 47th in the country. He single-handedly began the BNRP without any previous experience.

"The most important thing for me in this job is that I don't want to see our rivers get any worse or as bad as some of the other rivers in Virginia," he says.

"I want to keep these rivers healthy—and not have to resuscitate one after it's too late. It's hard enough doing preventive medicine on them."

Turner truly enjoys his work and gets to see the fruits of his labor. Most people should be so lucky. However, Turner acknowledges there are challenges. Such is the case when a hard rain occurs, and then Turner has his hands full—literally and physically.

"That's the way it works," he says, adding, "especially after a dry spell, when plastic bags and other trash land in the ditches; they then get washed to the river after a good rain."

To help spread the word about

the importance of clean, wild rivers and their crucial role in our environment, Turner regularly speaks at schools, clubs, retirement homes and other civic institutions. He not only educates his audiences, but also inspires them to help work to restore waterways.

The BNRP offers eco-cruises. These river trips take place on a pontoon boat captained by Turner for area schools and youth groups. The free tour allows students to learn about their local river firsthand.

Turner writes a column in the Franklin paper and recounts his journeys along both rivers via his Web site. He provides educational facts about the environment. The grassroots organization that he started now has more than 100 members.

Jeff Turner has accomplished all this as a paraplegic, resulting from a car accident when he was 17 which left him partially paralyzed on his left side. He suffers acute and chronic pain due to his condition. While others are littering and neglecting public resources, this conscientious man cleans up the mess of uncaring violators.

Turner's efforts have not gone unnoticed. He was nominated for one of the "Volvo for Life" awards in the environment category. As of this writing it is unknown whether he won, but he is a winner in the eyes of the Commonwealth regardless of the final vote tally.

"If you live out there on the river, you will become part of the river, and you will know and love her intimately," he asserts.

With a top-notch facility in place now all users of the Blackwater River will have easy access in downtown Franklin. Hurricanes and flooding rains cannot quell city spirit. They didn't before and they won't now. Come see and experience what this part of Virginia has to offer. You will be glad you did.

Marc N. McClade is a writer and photographer from Midlothian. Marc has been a regular contributor to Virginia Wildlife since 1998, and is an avid angler who travels throughout Virginia and other parts of the South.

Minimalist



*Could less be best
when it comes to
hunting Virginia's
springtime gobblers?*

by Bruce Ingram

Several years ago, a friend and I went spring gobbler hunting with a father and son team. My buddy went afield with a young man in his 30s and I accompanied the dad—a man who had accumulated the wisdom gained from spending some 40 years in the spring woods. Since my friend and I were the guests and afield on the home turf of the two family members, all agreed that the former would be the designated shooters while we would be the designated callers.

When the father and I arrived at a flat on top of a hill, the gentleman owl-hooted once and immediately six gobblers sounded off. The veteran hunter then instructed me to sit against a hardwood. He popped in a mouth call and uttered not another note of owl or turkey talk until dawn began to break. Then he emitted several sleepy hen tree yelps which elicited another chorus of gobbles. Soon afterward, we heard the toms fly down, and I shot the first longbeard to arrive. The old gentleman's performance was simple and effi-

*Box calls are great devices for
simulating realistic yelps and
clucks.*

©Bruce Ingram

Gunting 101

cient—what I call the “minimalist school of spring gobbler hunting.”

Contrast that successful outing with the one my buddy and the father’s son experienced. They too arrived at a likely flat where the young man laid out four box calls, three slates, two pouches of diaphragms, two tubes, an owl hooter, two crow calls, a hawk call, and a peacock call. The latter call, some readers will no doubt remember, was all the rage a few years ago. Assorted other sound makers and hunting paraphernalia had been stuffed into a vest and day-pack.

Before a rosy-fingered dawn arrived, my friend told me that the man had employed every one of the locator calls and, yes, the gobblers were sounding off repeatedly. And when the sun rose, the individual quickly strummed all of his boxes and slates and continually changed diaphragms as he kept up a non-stop barrage of yelps, clucks, cuts, cackles, purrs, kee kees and other turkey talk.

Despite numerous toms being close by, only one longbeard started to approach their position, but that turkey turned and left when the man hit the poor tom with a blast of obnoxious yelps from one of his box calls. My buddy was beside himself with frustration when we replayed our respective outings later.

“If the guy would have just shut up calling for five minutes, I swear I would have killed a bird,” he lamented.

An essential gear item is a blaze orange cap or vest, especially after a hunter has killed a tom or is walking through the woods.



©Bruce Ingram



©Bill Lea



The author, shown here, will often make a few yelps on a box call, then set it aside for long periods of time.



"He had too much stuff and wanted to play with all of it."

We spring gobbler enthusiasts certainly have a wealth of calls and gear to choose from, but I'm not sure that we need to either purchase it all or even if we did, have every bit of it with us every time we enter the woods. Whether you are a veteran or a newcomer to this pastime, here's what members of the minimalist school—like myself—will tote along to the woods this spring.

Calls

This April 12 on opening day of Virginia's spring gobbler season, I'll bring six turkey calls with me: a box

call in my right pants' pocket, a slate in my left pocket, a pouch with three diaphragms placed in my left shirt pocket, and a push pin in a jacket pocket. An owl hooter and a crow call will be tucked in my right shirt pocket.

Yes, I know that it has been often said and written that at certain times toms will only respond to one particular type of sound, and that we hunters must possess all varieties of calls so that we can be prepared to give the old boys that one specific sound that they yearn to hear.

Well, I'm not so sure about that. The longer I have chased spring gobblers, the less I have called, and when



I do, I almost always send forth soft sounds—another aspect of being a member of the minimalist school. I don't want a tom to feel that the "hen" he is hearing is all fired up and ready to charge into his strut zone. That kind of thinking—and calling—is going to result in a tom remaining right where he is and well out of range of some No. 4s.

The illusion I want to create is that of a hen close by that is mildly interested in the tom's gobbling overtures, but that is quite content to remain where she is and continue feeding. Consider this quip from actress Mae West: "Why don't you come over and see me some time, big boy?"

- ✓ After fly-down, I'll scratch out a few soft yelps on the slate and set it aside.
- ✓ Then will come a few soft yelps or clucks on a double or triple reed diaphragm.

What comes next will depend on a host of variables. I may have to reposition. If so I will use the crow call to try to obtain a fix on the tom. If an hour or more goes by and no gobbler has appeared, I may try moderate yelps or a few purrs from the push pin.

But the most important concept I want to communicate is this. Most of the time, the best strategy involves the following minimalist behavior:

- Call softly.
 - Call infrequently.
 - Sit in one place.
 - Keep hand and body movement to a minimum.
 - Constantly scan the woods.
- Result...you'll kill more longbeards.

Other Gear

I do admit to bringing along a few other items. For safety's sake, I place a blaze orange cap in my lower right pants' pocket. Every time I tag a tom, I immediately don the cap. Doing so makes me feel safer as I'm toting a bird and walking back to my vehicle. I also will wear the cap if I'm walking through the forest, especially if other hunters may be present.

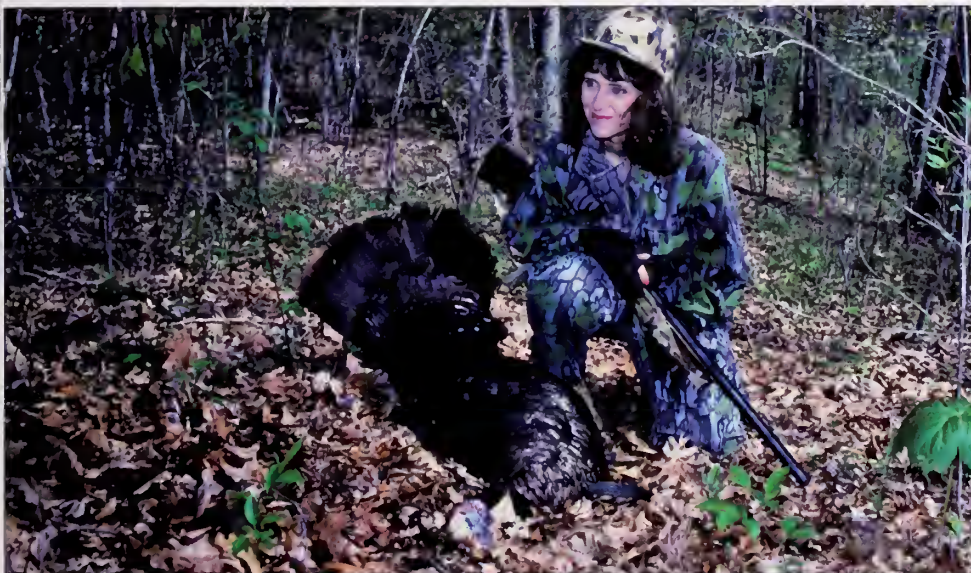
In my left pants' pocket will be two extra shells and my hunting license, and in my lower left pants' pocket, a water bottle. I don't bring food. We have to be out of Virginia woods by noon anyway, so I can wait until then to eat. And I can't keep hand movement to a minimum if I'm constantly stuffing food into my mouth.

Concession to Comfort

Over the years, the one concession to the gear gods I have made is that I always bring a large seat cushion, one of those models that also features a back rest. It allows me to sit longer and more comfortably—again, eliminating excess movement. If a gobbler suddenly sounds off nearby, this type can be set up more easily than the standard cushion that folds down from a vest after it is un-snapped from its upright position—a very time consuming maneuver.

Recently, I read a magazine article about the three dozen or so essential items that every turkey hunter should have in order to be successful. I'm sure the magazine's advertisers loved the press they received. But I'm also sure that we Virginia turkey hunters don't really need mounds and mounds of stuff. Whether you are a novice or an expert, consider attending the minimalist school this spring. □

Bruce Ingram is the author of The James River Guide, The New River Guide, The Shenandoah / Rappahannock Rivers Guide and Fly and Spin Fishing for River Smallmouths. To obtain a copy, contact him at be_ingram@juno.com.



The Virginia hunter doesn't have to purchase a lot of gear to be successful. With a little practice, a box or slate call may be all that you need to lure in that big gobbler.

That's what I want my calling to "say" to a gobbler.

Toward that goal, here is my typical early morning calling sequence.

- ✓ Thirty minutes before sunrise, I'll perform the "Who Cooks for You" chorus of the barred owl. I will then make adjustments on where to set up, based on the response I receive.
- ✓ Right before fly-down, I'll emit my first turkey sounds of the morning—a few sleepy hen yelps on the box and set it aside.



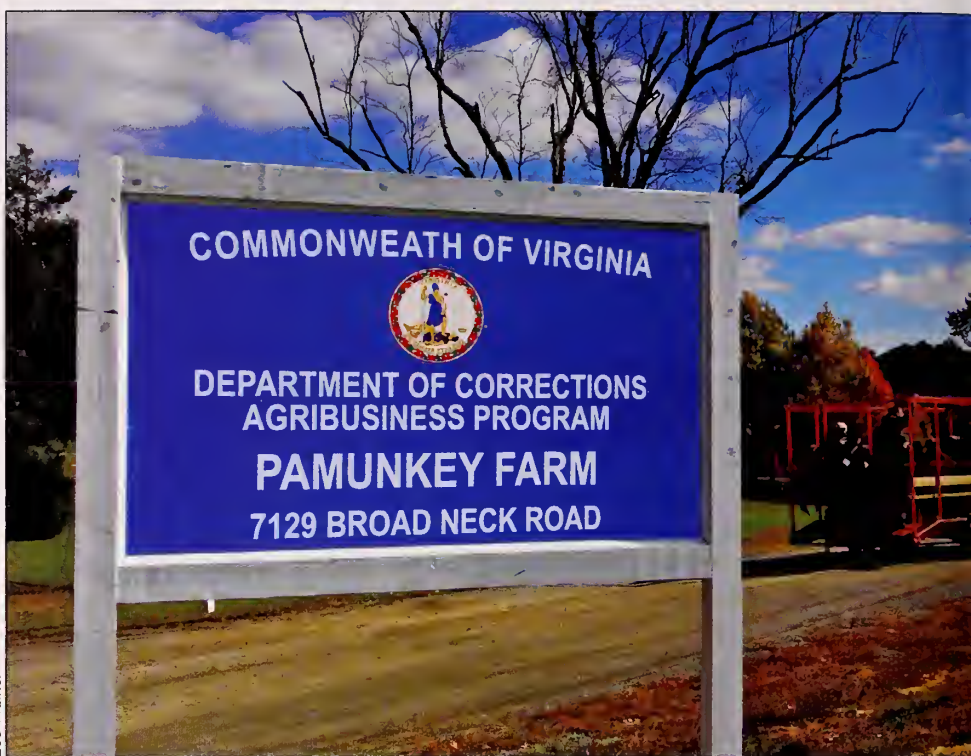
Small in size, but big in accomplishments, the Pamunkey Farm restoration project is a perfect model for agriculture stewardship and the importance of restoring our vanishing wetlands.

by Megan McKinley

At the end of his timeless piece, "Tattered Coat," Nash Buckingham writes, "I'm sure there will be stout-bred American sportsmen to carry on traditions of the nation's Beaver Dams (his duck hunting club)...Places if not old, then self-made, where hardy fellows will work their ways to earn again the drag of game-laden tattered coats against their shoulder blades, and, while trudging homeward from shooting in the starlit dusk, will manage, deep in their souls, to 'dig the sunken sunset from the deep.'"

Already noticing the effects of depleted habitat and overshooting of the nation's waterfowl, Buckingham recognized some 65 years ago that it would require the hard work and dedication of future sportsmen to keep the ducks flying and the wetlands wet.

No one appreciates and understands this more than the recent participants in the Pamunkey Farm Conservation Partnership, a project that included turning 15 acres of pasture into functioning wetlands, installing riparian buffers, implementing a rotational grazing system, and creating a permanent watering system. In the end the project benefited waterfowl and other wildlife, enhanced water



Lee Walker

Protecting Our

quality, and improved farming efficiency.

Initiated with Governor Jim Gilmore's Executive Order 72 in 2000, which established the Virginia Wetlands Restoration Coordinating Committee, it has been a long and arduous road in creating the wetlands on Pamunkey Farm, a 1,700-acre working cattle ranch and state juvenile corrections facility.

The magnitude of the project required a partnership between the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the Hanover County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the VA Department of Forestry, the VA Department of Corrections, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Just incorporating a rotational grazing system necessitated literally miles of fencing, but established no

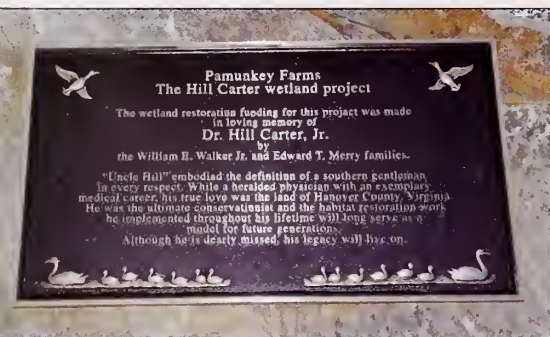
grazing zones that allow for riparian buffers and the creation of wetlands. In order to create an area that would hold water, those working on the project plugged up ditches and built a low level berm that allows rain water to back up during wet years. The practice, called moist soil management, creates a scenario where the area will dry during the summer months, allowing natural foods to grow. The low spot then floods in the fall and winter, providing food sources for ducks and geese and other marsh birds. To provide the most suitable habitat, managers of the property will incorporate short, high-intensity grazing every three or four years in order to get rid of undesirable plants.

David Norris, Wetland Project Leader for the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, acknowledges the teamwork required in accomplishing a goal of such lofty proportions.

"What we did, essentially," he says, "was restore an entire farm. It took a lot of people and a lot of hard work." And the accomplishment has

Conservation partnerships extend resources and offer demonstration sites that inspire future agricultural stewardship projects.

Lee Walker





Lee Walker

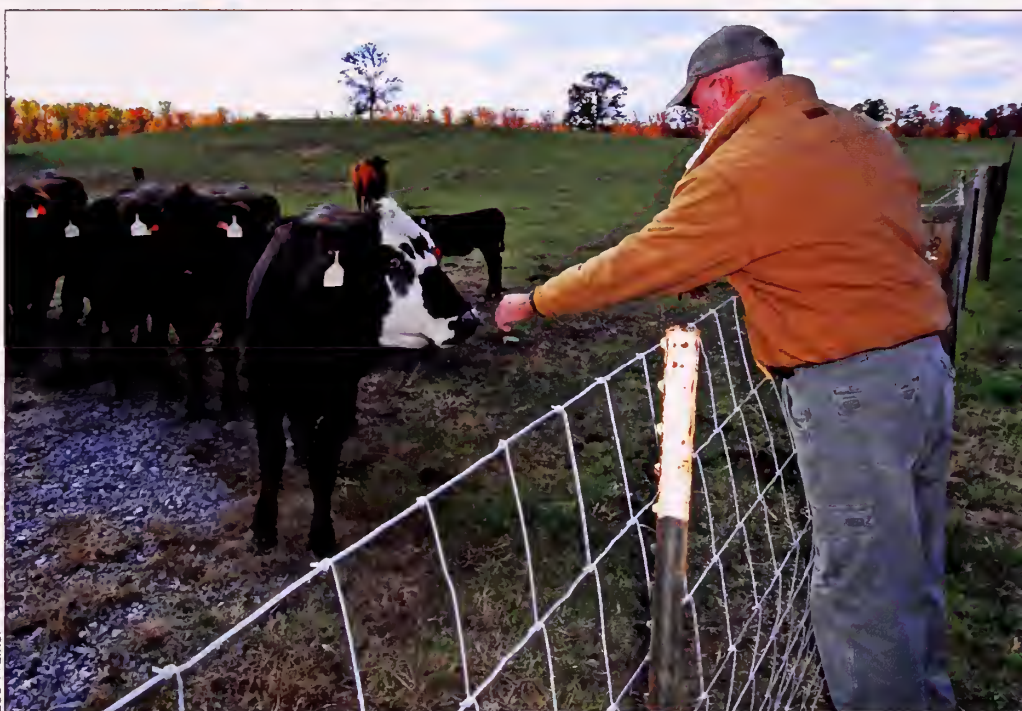
Wetlands

Best management practices at Pamunkey Farm help to improve and protect water quality as well as promote good wildlife habitat. This project benefits more than eight miles of the Pamunkey River and 510 acres of riparian buffer, forest and wetlands.

not gone unnoticed. The Pamunkey Farm restoration site recently captured the Clean Water Farm award for the York River basin at the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts' annual conference.

If Nash Buckingham were alive today, he would certainly be proud of those who joined forces on this project to restore and protect our wetlands. After all, we are the sportsmen that he refers to in "Tattered Coat." We embody his vision of a future where men and women would come together to save the wild world he knew and loved so well. The Pamunkey Farm restoration site is a fine example of what people can accomplish, working together and working hard, with a common goal in sight. This stewardship project protects

Lee Walker



eight miles of the Pamunkey River and its tributaries, including 510 acres of riparian buffer, forestland and existing wetlands. And most importantly, it begins the process of "digging the sunken sunset from the deep." □

Megan Mckinley is the director of development for Blue Sky Fund, a foundation dedicated to providing outdoor opportunities for inner-city kids (<http://blueskyfund.org>).

For more information on restoring wetlands on your property please contact:

David Norris
VDGIF Wetlands Project Manager
David.Norris@dgif.virginia.gov

Weaving an Environment

Students from Patrick Copeland Elementary School are finding that learning about the history of their community is helping them become better stewards of their environment.

story and photos
by Gail Brown

Want to keep up with the kids at Hopewell's Patrick Copeland Elementary School? Well, following the old adage, "Early to bed and early to rise," might help. That, coupled with a good breakfast, your fastest sneakers, and a determination to have fun while you work hard should do the trick.

As one of the state's newest *Virginia Naturally* schools, the administration and staff, with the support of their PTA, have worked hard to lay a strong foundation for Patrick Copeland's (PCES) environmental initiatives. Students at PCES work together to conserve water and energy and they also run a schoolwide paper recycling program. And while the school's efforts to meet all four criteria required of first year *Virginia Naturally* schools hit the mark, their efforts to provide meaningful field experiences for all of their students stands out as exemplary.

Right: *First graders create Native American pottery in art class; decorations on "artifacts" show respect for the natural world.*



Tires in a playground are fun and help to keep the soil in place.

Field experiences on campus include working in schoolyard gardens, schoolwide Earth Day celebrations, and ongoing efforts to stem water runoff in their fledgling "tire playground." Water monitoring experiences at Pocahontas State Park and field trips to Luray Caverns and

the Chesapeake Bay all contribute to an appreciation of the diversity of the Commonwealth's natural resources.

But the hallmark of PCES's environmental initiatives, whether off or on campus, may well be their effort to



ental Tapestry



Above: Students use oyster shells to hollow out a canoe at Henricus Historical Park.

Below: Principal Jones and children learn in the herb garden.

Top right: Big job—small shovels—but kindergartners can do it!

Bottom right: A Native American project was created by all second grade students.



weave the history and geography of the Commonwealth into all curricula. The payoff? The big picture is not lost in the details and all learning becomes more meaningful.

Ensuring that all students have a solid understanding of the history of their community is critical in helping children develop civic responsibility and leadership skills. To this end the staff works together to ensure all students have many opportunities to be active participants in their education. In short (and this is why you need your sneakers), the kids learn the connection between history, natural resources, and civic responsibility by becoming active participants in their education both at school and at the many historic sites in the area.

When studying the life and challenges of the early colonists or the culture of the area's Appomattock Indian tribe, Patrick Copeland's second graders do not get out their pencils and sit still. No way! These lucky students get on a bus and take a field trip to nearby Henricus Historical Park. There, overlooking the historic James River, students enter a re-created English colony and an Indian village to try their hands with period tools and experience the daily struggles of life nearly 400 years ago.

According to Omar, "The best part was when we scraped off the log to make a canoe."



Selena added, "I would like my family to go see it."

Conservation of natural resources is presented in an exciting way in Patrick Copeland's classrooms as well, in a large part because the staff and administration take full advantage of the educational resources in the community.

Residents of Hopewell can stand at City Point, the name and site of historic Hopewell, and see the Appomattox and James rivers join forces to push downstream to the area where the first English settlement at Jamestown was established. In addition to being important during the Revolutionary War, City Point served as Lieutenant General Grant's headquarters and as the supply center for Union troops during the Civil War.

The military presence today takes on a friendlier form, however, when educators from Fort Lee's Quartermaster Museum and Army Women's Museum arrive at school with a replica of General George Washington's Revolutionary War trunk and artifacts from colonial times. Using the same analytical skills that serve us well in all areas of life, students try to determine just what purpose the various objects once served and how they helped people survive. The daring accom-



plishments of our earliest heroes and heroines jump to life when students dress up in period costumes and role-play events of the past under the guidance of Fort Lee's master educators.

In addition, last year soldiers from the HHC 49th Quartermaster Group, the HHC 530th CSSB, and the 267th Quartermaster Company from

Above: Wooden "pounders" were used to turn corn kernels into cornmeal.

Below left: Period costumes from the museums at Fort Lee spark excitement for learning.

Below: Deer bones were used for tools and arrowheads; nothing was wasted.

All pictures at Henricus Historical Park.



Fort Lee volunteered to work side by side with then-5th grade teachers Kristin Dewald, Pam Klein and their students to get their tire playground/conservation area off the ground—literally. The playground, a work in progress, is a student-led initiative to stop erosion adjacent to the school. With friends from Fort Lee providing the muscle, donated tires from business partner Pearson's Auto were partially buried in the play area in the spring of 2006.

While the tires serve as a great place to run, jump and exercise large muscles, they also provide an excellent jumping-off point in efforts to stem the rapid runoff plaguing the area. Taking this project to the next level will require that students and teachers learn about and work with agencies such as the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the local Soil and Water Conservation District, and other government organizations. Opportunities to take an active role and work with community agencies give *Virginia Naturally* schools an edge in providing leadership experiences to their students.

This May, K-12 educators across the Commonwealth will assess efforts made at their schools to engage



Above: Science partners take a close look at a cicada exoskeleton.

Below left: Everyone takes a turn pounding deer sinew to make a strong bow string.

Below right: Maps and toy soldiers show geography's impact on history.

students in environmental stewardship activities. First-year applicants for *Virginia Naturally* status will submit applications by June 30th and provide information in the following four areas: administrative support; staff development/curriculum integration; resource conservation, and meaningful field experiences (for more information, <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/education/school-recognition/>).

Patrick Copeland's effort to weave an environmental tapestry that tells their community's story is a fine example of a *Virginia Naturally* school taking its first steps to help children learn to become good stewards of the environment. Your child's school may be eligible to join others determined to make a similar investment in Virginia's natural resources. Why don't you pack a lunch, grab your sneakers and join them, too? ☐

Gail Brown is a retired principal for Chesterfield County Public Schools. She is a lifelong learner and educator, and her teaching and administrative experiences in grades K-12 have taught her that project-based environmental programs teach science standards, promote core values, and provide exciting educational experiences for the entire community.



Ruffed Gr

story and illustrations
by Spike Knuth

To some it is known simply as the "pa'tridge." To others, the woods pheasant, mountain pheasant, "bomber of the woods," or "chicken of the forest." Hunters know it for its startling habit of exploding out of heavy cover, and others may know it by its habit of "drumming" during the spring mating season. Early settlers called it the "fool hen" because of its lack of fear of man, to the point that it could be dispatched with sticks or stones from its roost. There are some reports of settlers stealing eggs from the grouse's nest and hatching and raising them under their own domestic hens!

Ruffed grouse were originally found in the eastern portions of Virginia.

In 1607 John Smith mentioned seeing "Pa'tridges...a little bigger than our quails" around Jamestown. Other early records in the 1600-1700s tell of them being found around Chesapeake Bay and Norfolk.

The ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) is about 18 inches long, and averages 1 1/2 to 1 3/4 pounds, the males being a bit larger. Their color above is basically brownish, spotted, streaked and marked with dark browns, buffs, and black. The underside is light brown or buffy, and white, barred with dark brown or black. Their tail is warm brown or ash, crossed with narrow bands of dark brown or black, with the outer band being much wider and tipped with white.



Ruffed grouse

Be Wild!

ouse

Wild grape

Actually the grouse exhibits two morphs or color phases: grayish brown and reddish brown. Its ruff, or neck feathers, is an iridescent purplish-black, which gives the bird its name, and the head shows a noticeable crest.

The ruffed grouse inhabits deep thickets, sheltered swamps, and forest edges. Requirements for good grouse habitat are woodlands that contain a number of coniferous trees to provide cover during severe winters, a water source close by, clearings for brooding young, and dusting places found along old dirt trails or edges of roads. It favors cleared areas that are in the early stages of forest succession—following fire, lumbering and farming activities.

The ruffed grouse is best known for the male's mating and territorial displays. In spring, the cocks choose a



Grouse cock drumming

Live Wild! Grow Wild!





Grouse hen on nest

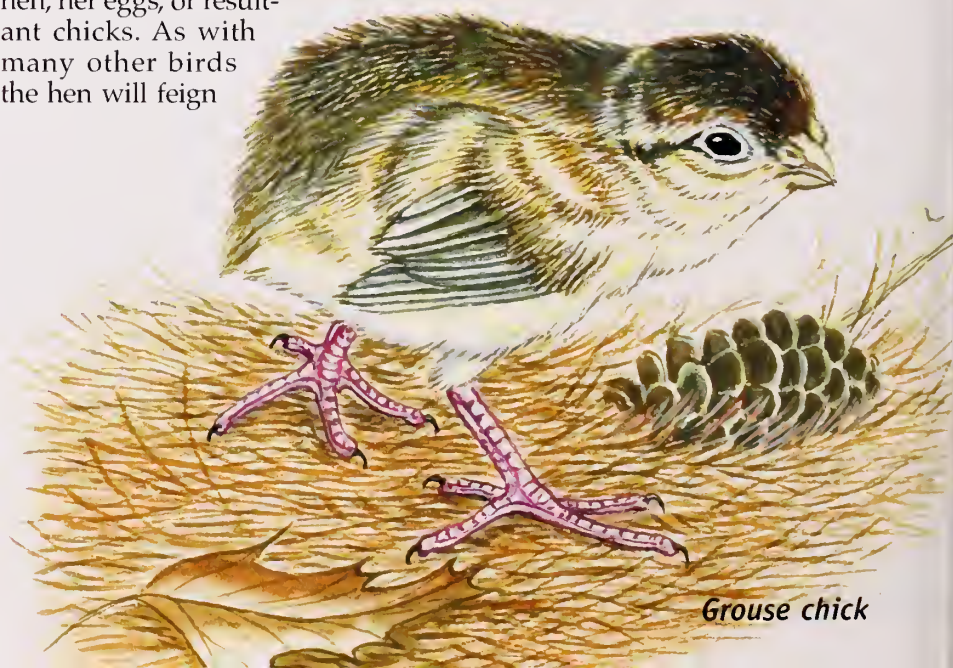
territory and seek out one or more logs or rocks, where they strut and fan their tail and beat the air with their wings. They begin flapping slowly at first, then pick up speed until wings are a blur. The rush of air compressed between their wings results in a drumming sound often described as an old outboard motor or motorcycle. The booming sound is not, as once thought, caused by drumming on an old hollow log. Females are attracted to the sound, which at the same time challenges other males and announces and claims ownership of the area. The cock will mate with two or more hens.

The hens begin nesting about mid-April on the ground in dense underbrush, borders of woods, along logs, or at the base of large trees or tree stumps. The nest is basically a depression in the forest floor, lined

with leaves, roots, grasses and feathers. The female's colors blend perfectly with her surroundings as she incubates her buffy colored eggs. A clutch may number six to 16 and hatch in about 24 days. Cold, wet spring weather can be rough on the hen, her eggs, or resultant chicks. As with many other birds the hen will feign

injury to lead potential predators away from her hidden babies. If all goes well, and as soon as their natal down is dry, the hen leads the chicks from the nest to brooding areas, usually small forest clearings edged with dense cover.

The grouse and her brood generally feed early in the morning or in the evening. They rely heavily on insects at this time. The grouse's summer diet consists of insects, spring berries, fruits and seeds, sedges and green leaves. In fall, grouse feed on all manner of wild fruits and nuts,



Grouse chick



Red oak

such as wild grapes, dogwood, hawthorne, greenbrier, elderberry, acorns and beechnuts.

In addition to harsh weather, certain diseases and nest marauders, such as squirrels, chipmunks and skunks, are responsible for most grouse mortality. Brood mortality can be as high as 60 percent or more in any given year. Studies show that as few as 12 percent of all eggs laid sur-

Grouse hen



Beechnut

vive to adulthood. Rarely do grouse live past their second year. Hunting takes less than 23 percent of the total population. Grouse populations are cyclical over much of their range for reasons not really known. A grouse cock is an independent critter according to most studies. He likes a lot of space and may have a home range of up to five miles all by himself. Hens and their young may travel more and be found in small groups.

The young are able to fly in about three weeks. As they mature, the young of the year go through a strange, restless period called the "fall shuffle," or "panic or crazy flight," as if confused. Many kill themselves by flying headlong into trees, dense thickets, or man-made structures. The apparent purpose of the behavior is to allow for dispersal of the new broods, a spreading out from where they were reared. At this time they may wander for many miles to find suitable habitat that is unpopulated by other grouse.



Grouse hen

As daylight hours shorten, glandular changes trigger the growth of "snowshoes," which are comb-like growths that emerge from the sides of the toes. In areas that get snow, the growths enable the grouse to walk over soft snow without sinking in. In regions that get a lot of snowfall, grouse have the habit of burrow roosting under the snow. The snow acts as an insulator against the cold on winter nights. This can be disastrous if a night thaw or sleet forms a crust over top. The bird could get trapped beneath.

In regions with little snowfall, grouse will roost in thick conifers such as cedar, hemlock and pine, and in evergreens like rhododendron, holly or laurel. During very severe weather, they will move into ravines, hollows and swamps. In winter, grouse feed on any remaining dried fruits and nuts, plus the buds of aspen and birch, especially during periods of food scarcity.

Ruffed grouse are found mostly in the eastern U.S. and Canada, but spill over into the eastern plains and scattered populations are found in other areas of the west. The ruffed grouse is common in Virginia's mountains and some are occasionally found down in the foothills and into the Piedmont.

Attempts were made in the late 1980s to re-establish the grouse in some of its former eastern range. Grouse were trapped and relocated to promising habitat in the Chickahominy WMA, where they were reproducing and holding fast for the first few years. But populations have not rebounded in eastern Virginia. For now, it appears, we must travel to the Blue Ridge to listen to the drumming of the ruffed grouse. □

Spike Kuuth is an avid naturalist and wildlife artist. For over 30 years his artwork and writing have appeared in Virginia Wildlife. Spike is also a member of the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association.

Be Wild! Live Wild! Grow Wild! is a regular feature that highlights Virginia's Wildlife Action Plan, which is designed to unite natural resources agencies, sportsmen and women, conservationists and citizens in a common vision for the conservation of the Commonwealth's wildlife and habitats in which they live. To learn more or to become involved with this new program visit: bewildvirginia.org.



Journal

2008 Outdoor Calendar of Events

Unless otherwise noted, for more information go to the "Upcoming Events" page on the Department's Web site at www.HuntFishVA.com.

April 5: Kids Fishing Heritage Day, Graves Mountain Lodge. Starts 9:00 a.m. For more information, call 540-923-4231.

May 3: Canoe Fishing Workshop, Beaverdam Swamp Reservoir, Gloucester.

June 24: Smallmouth Workshop, New River, Radford.

August 5: Flat Out Catfishing Workshop, James River, Richmond.

August 22-24: Mother-Daughter Outdoors, Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center, Appomattox. For females 9 years of age and above.

September 20: Fly Fishing Workshop, Riven Rock Park, Harrisonburg.

October 18: Family Fishing Workshop, Bear Creek Lake State Park, Cumberland. □

Walleye and Tidal River Bass Fishing Forecasts "Great in 2008"

by Fred Leckie, Assistant Director, Fisheries Division

Getting anxious to go fishing? Ready to try out that new fishing gear? Well, fishing for a number of freshwater species will be picking up soon and we can all look forward to fishing being "Great in 2008." To help you get started, VDGIF fisheries biologists from across the state have just completed three major forecast reports. The 2008 Walleye Fishing Forecast, prepared by VDGIF Regional Fisheries Biologist Tom Hampton, the 2008 Tidal River Largemouth

Bass Outlook, completed by VDGIF Regional Fisheries Biologist for Tidewater, Bob Greenlee, and the 2008 Smallmouth Bass River Fishing Forecast completed by Scott Smith, Fisheries Biologist for south-central Virginia and chairman of the VDGIF Smallmouth River technical committee.

Smith and many other fisheries biologists from around the state studied their scientific data, along with on-the-water experience, to come up with the latest forecast of what anglers will hopefully encounter as they hit the walleye, tidal largemouth, and smallmouth bass rivers this year. The "Great in 2008" Fishing Forecasts are available on the VDGIF Web site. These forecasts are a "must see" for anyone in pursuit of walleye, tidal largemouth, and river smallmouth bass. The comprehensive reports will help you decide where, when and how to pursue these popular fish species. □



by Beth Hester

Hunting And Fishing Cartoons
by R. Stubler
2007 Cold Tree Press
615-309-4984
www.coldtreepress.com

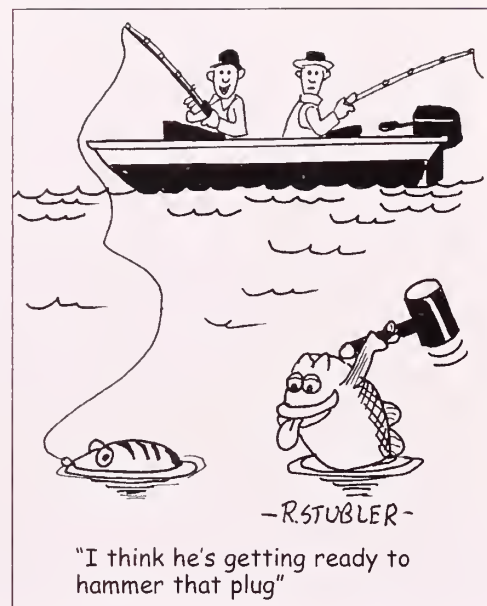
For years, the works of Richard Stubler have been a regular feature in *Virginia Wildlife* magazine. Now, well over a hundred of his straightforward, well-loved cartoons are featured in a single volume.

There is an old-fashioned and understated charm to Stubler's cartoons, and perhaps the most successful are those depicting hunters and anglers thwarted by the antics of anthropomorphic wildlife. Outdoor en-



thusiasts of all stripes will chuckle, seeing their own foibles illustrated in stark, black and white line drawing. Hunters and anglers become their own worst enemy: falling from deer stands, getting tangled up in nets, or deciding to change gun barrels while a bear looms large and menacing in the background.

Stubler, who grew to love the open-air while trampling around rural Pennsylvania in his youth, has been cartooning for over 50 years, and this collection is filled with snippets of gentle humor distilled from decades of astute outdoor observation. □



Outdoor Kids

The Snow Bird

by Nathan Collins

Youth spring turkey hunting is something to gobble about.

Hi, my name is Nathan Collins and I'm 11 years old. I'd like to share an adventure about hunting that my dad and I had in the spring of 2007.

It's the Friday night before the opening of Spring Youth Day and the



forecast is calling for snow. That's not enough to stop us though. I'm already packing my gear.

"Better get a good night's sleep," says Dad.

So I go to bed at eight o'clock. Dad wakes me up at 5:30 in the morning. When I get up, I go outside to look at the ground and the weatherman was right; there are four inches of snow covering the ground. Now the only thing I need to do is get dressed and load my gun and gear into the truck.

"I hope those new shells you bought work today," I say. (I'll be using my dad's Browning pump.)

We are finally on our way when we realize that we need gas. After leaving Baker's store where we got gas, it's already 6:15. We finally get to our hunting ground at 6:30 and the snow is everywhere. It continues to fall from the sky. As we're walking to our spot a truck goes by.

"Did that truck park by us?" Dad asks.

"I don't know."

"Gobble, gobble, gobble. Gobble, gobble, gobble."

"Did you hear that, Dad?"

"Yeah son. Let's set up in that hedgerow."

We set up quickly and Dad lets out a couple of yelps with the mouth call. It was enough to work. Five minutes later a turkey comes running in across the field.

"He's coming," says Dad. "Get ready, he's a nice bird."

My heart is about to beat out of my chest as I anxiously get my gun ready.

"I see him," I say.

Dad tells me, "He's in range. When you get a clear shot, take him."

As the turkey comes walking into the nearby clearing, I put the bead right on his neck. I'm getting ready to squeeze the trigger when Dad says, "Wait, there's a bigger one behind him."

However, this big bird does not want to come into the clearing like the other one. Dad gives a few light clucks and the turkey turns around and comes right to us.

"He's in range. Shoot when you've got a clear shot," says Dad.

I don't have my gun up yet, but to my luck there's a tree in front of me that I use to get my gun up. Now my heart is racing.

"Shoot," Dad whispers.

"I don't have a clear shot. There's sticks in my way," I whisper back.

All of a sudden, the turkey stops.

"Oh no," I think to myself, "he's leaving." My heart is about to beat out of my chest.

But my dad does a few more light clucks and the turkey turns back again. He walks into the opening. I push the safety off and line the bead up on his neck.

"BANG! I got him!!" I yell as I put my safety back on.

"Let's go get him," urges Dad.

"What time is it, Dad?"

"Six fifty-seven," he says. "Wow, we got him early."

We walk over to where he is and he's flopping on the ground.

"Look Dad, I broke his neck."

"Right where you're supposed to hit him," Dad responds.

As we walk out of the snow covered field, Dad says we'll always remember this hunt and the snow bird. My Dad and I have a lot of great memories of our hunting trips together. After we register him we go home and measure his beard. It's eight and a quarter inches.

"Wow, he's big," I think out loud.

We sit down to the dinner table that night to a meal of turkey and fixings my mom prepared, and boy was it delicious. My mom always puts a great meal on the table after our hunting trips. My dad was right: This is one adventure I won't ever forget. □



Letters From Our Readers

Late in the 2007 black powder hunting season on the morning of November 15, a soft rain was falling and I was relaxing in my recliner after lunch, enjoying the view. As I looked across the marsh towards the York River, I see what I think is a dog with something in its mouth, running at the edge of the marsh along a bean field about 30 yards from my house. I try and get a look at it with my binoculars but I was too slow and lost track of it. Something just didn't register right in my mind about what I saw, but I let it go.

About 30 minutes later as I was walking through the house, I glanced out the window towards the marsh and saw walking across my lawn a small deer with its head stuck completely inside a clear plastic container. It had a large opening, and was about the size of a gallon container, the kind pretzels might come in. The deer was slowly making its way across the lawn, a path that is regularly used by deer to get to a large wooded area. It held its head up, looking through the bottom of the container as it was walking. I knew that this is what I had earlier thought was a dog in the bean field.

I knew right away that this deer wouldn't survive long without food and water, and my only choice, and the best one for the deer, was to harvest the animal. After field dressing it, I saw how it would have been impossible for this deer to lose the container on its own. It was back over the neck, with the ears inside keeping it tight and secure. It was a small fawn, very well fed, so I'm sure it didn't have the container on for long.

It is sad what man's pollution does to our wildlife. As a hunter, I don't usually harvest the yearlings. I'm sorry this one didn't have a chance to have another year to roam, but on the other hand, we will enjoy it in our favorite venison recipe.

Mel Delagrance
Barhamsville

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Is A Career in Wildlife Law Enforcement For You?

Individuals who are interested in a law enforcement career could easily find themselves migrating into the field of natural resources where exciting opportunities await them as Conservation Police Officers. Once known as Game Wardens, these public safety professionals dedicate their lives to the protection of our natural resources by enforcing laws and regulations that regulate the activities of sportsmen and women who participate in outdoor recreation. Before pursuing this career path, candidates should consider both the attraction of working outdoors as well as the inherent dangers of the profession. If you have the ability to rise to such demands, then you may very well have what it takes to become a Virginia Conservation Police Officer!

Qualifications

Applicants for the position of Conservation Police Officer must possess a high-school diploma or GED equivalent and be at least 21 years of age by the date of hire. Experience that provides the required knowledge, skills and abilities is essential. Additionally, applicants must have a safe driving history and possess or be eligible for a valid Virginia driver's license. Medical (including hearing and vision testing), psychological and polygraph examinations will be conducted as part of the selection process. Successful applicants will also un-

dergo a background investigation that will include educational achievements, prior work experience, character and reputation, credit history and a criminal history check.

Additionally, candidates must be willing to:

- travel to complete testing and screening at their own expense
- complete a swimming and physical agility assessment
- relocate within the area of assignment
- work days, nights, weekends and holidays
- travel overnight as assigned

After attending the 29-week Basic Law Enforcement Academy, newly sworn officers will undergo a 15-week field training program under the direction of a Field Training Officer. Only after this extensive training does the new officer earn the title of Virginia Conservation Police Officer.

For more information about becoming a Virginia Conservation Police Officer visit our Web site at www.dgif.virginia.gov.

Virginia Department of Game
and Inland Fisheries
P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street
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On The Water

by Jim Crosby



Add a Fish-Depth Finder to Your Plastic Boat?

Small boats powered by electric motors offer some challenges to those who want to install a fish-depth finder. Who wants to put a hole in their plastic or aluminum boat hull? I faced just that situation and looked at a lot of possible solutions. I found the effort worthwhile because it really is nice to be able to study the contours of the bottom, see fish moving around under your boat, and even monitor the voltage of your battery—all at the same time.

This is just such a boon to the small boat fisherman; yet, many have not attempted it because of the complications of mounting the control and read-out unit, as well as the transducer—the underwater transmitter/receiver. Canoes, kayaks and johnboats don't lend themselves to such installations. The units generally require mounting on or under the hull and this is not the challenge for fiberglass or wooden boats that it becomes on plastic and aluminum hulls.

I have a 10-foot cathedral hull, ABS plastic boat that I didn't want to drill holes into but I really wanted a depth finder. After some time spent shopping and investigating the various solutions, I decided to purchase the most common fish-depth finder model and mount the transducer on the underwater case of the electric motor. I got the idea after seeing some electric motors with the finder's transducer built in.

I used a stainless steel hose clamp to mount the transducer on the motor and kept it back as far from the prop



as possible so it would not be disturbed by its spin and wash. I also wanted the protection offered by the skig. I ran the coax cable up the shaft of the electric motor and into the boat along the path of the motor's power cable.

I took it out for a test run and found it worked perfectly. There was no interference from the electric motor for which I had some concern.

I also benefitted from an unexpected bonus because the model I purchased (under \$100) displayed not only the bottom contour and fish sized proportionally, but it also monitored the battery's voltage. This great feature was designed to not leave you out there with a sudden voltage drop. It's still a sound idea to always take your paddle along. I find paddles are much more efficient (and therefore less tiring) than paddling with only your hands!

The next challenge is determining where to mount the control and readout unit on a canoe, johnboat or kayak. In my case, I built a small console that screwed to the floorboards amid ship. You could also clamp or screw a nicely sanded and varnished plank amid ship across the gunwale for this purpose. Adding a rimmed edge would make this a great little shelf for other doodads as well.

Needless to say, I was very pleased with the installation. The pictures here might answer some questions. Note that the transducer is mounted near the skig, which will protect it from a grounding or striking something in the water.

The second view shows the coax cable running up the motor shaft and into the boat alongside the motor's power cable. □

Please Note: I always welcome feedback, input and/or suggestions from readers. My email address is: jecrosby@comcast.net

Photo Tips

by Lynda Richardson

Tips For Creating Better Photographs - Part 1

While judging the entries for our very special March "Photography Showcase" issue this past January, it came to our attention that there were many "almost" winners who could have placed if not for various technical problems. So, based on what we saw during judging, I decided to offer our readers a few pointers to help improve their photography skills and better their chances of winning next year.

The number one technical problem was that many photographs just weren't sharp. Sharpness within an image can be seen from two different angles: subject sharpness, and how much of a photograph is in focus in front of and behind the subject. For some pictures, it is crucial that the whole image is sharp, foreground to background. Usually landscape photos fall into this category. In other photographs, you might only want a certain point crisp and in focus while the rest of the image can be "soft" or out of focus. It is a matter of individual artistic taste as to how much in focus a photograph should be... to an extent. But, normally, your main subject should be in focus!

Depth-of-field refers to how much is in focus in front of and behind your subject. After you focus on a subject, your depth-of-field will always fall one-third in front of your subject and two-thirds behind. Depth-of-field can be gauged in millimeters (macro photography), or it can be in inches (portraits) or feet or yards (landscape). Depth-of-field is controlled by the camera's aperture, also known as the f-stop. An aperture setting in the low numbers, such as f.2.8 or f.5.6, will not give you much depth-of-field while higher numbers, such as f.11.0 or f.22.0, will. Using depth-of-field to control overall image sharpness is key to making great photographs.



"Photographing this great egret off center and looking into the frame made for a much more interesting composition than having it smack dab in the center." ©2006 Lynda Richardson

Composition tends to be the next troublemaker for some photographers. A lot of photographers just can't place their subjects anywhere but in the center of the frame. Didn't everyone read my Photo Tips column on composition? ("Improve Your Photographs with Better Composition," September 2007) If nothing else, experiment and try placing your subject in different parts of the image area—anywhere but the center!

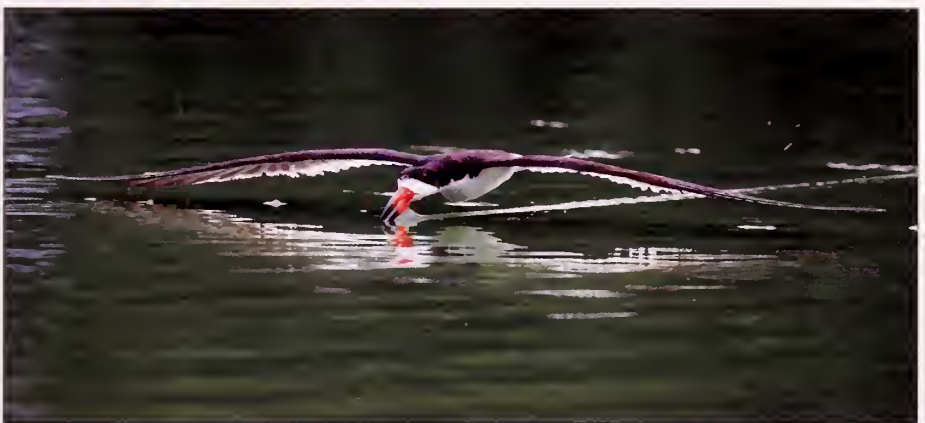
Another problem that crops up is distracting foregrounds and backgrounds. When shooting a scene,

make sure that something like a twig or sprig of grass doesn't spoil your photograph by popping up through the middle of your subject's face. Be on the watch for distracting elements in your backgrounds too. White, black, very colorful objects, and repeated patterns in the background can really take away from your main subject, and you don't want that! Always strive for a "clean" background and foreground that doesn't detract from your subject.

In the upcoming May "Photo Tips" column, I will offer a few more suggestions on how to make your photographs even better. Good luck, and happy shooting! □

You are invited to submit one of your best images to "Image of the Month," Virginia Wildlife Magazine, P.O. Box 11104, (4010 West Broad Street), Richmond, VA, 23230-1104. Send original slides, high quality prints, or high-res jpeg files on disk and include a self addressed, stamped envelope or other shipping method for return. Also, please include any pertinent information regarding how and where the image was captured, what camera, film and settings you used. I hope to see your image as our next "Image of the Month"!

Image of the Month



Talk about sharpness...Check out this killer shot of a black skimmer captured by 19-year-old Ben Hallissy of Hampton! Ben shot this photograph in Ridgeway Park, in Hampton, using a Canon EOS 20D digital camera and a Canon EF 70-200mm f4.0 L lens hand held at 1/500th at f4.0 at ISO 800. Way to go Ben! Awesome!

RECIPES

by Joan Cone

April is for Wild Turkey Gobblers

Rather than roasting a whole wild turkey, consider removing the breasts from the carcass and then skinning them. Remember, the thighs do not become tender enough to eat with just roasting. They should be cooked in a crockpot or pressure cooker.

After removing the breast meat, cut these into individual servings or into a one-pound piece needed for the following recipe. Wrap the other breast pieces in a plastic wrap and vacuum pack them if you have a machine for this. If not, place them in a heavy duty freezer bag and remove as much air as possible with a straw.

MENU

Artichoke Dip
Deep Dish Wild Turkey Pot Pie
Apple-Pear-Date Salad
Strawberry Shortcake

Artichoke Dip

¾ pound cream cheese, softened
½ cup chicken broth
½ cup mayonnaise
½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
3 scallions trimmed and chopped
Garlic powder to taste
1 tablespoon lemon juice
2 teaspoons lemon zest
2 cups coarsely chopped artichokes-either jarred (drained) or frozen (thawed)
Salt and pepper to taste
2 splashes of Worcestershire sauce
Crackers or toasted pita triangles

Combine the first 9 ingredients in a food processor bowl fitted with the steel blade. Process until smooth. Add the artichokes, salt, pepper and Worcestershire to the cream cheese mixture. Process again, briefly. The mixture should remain chunky. Transfer to a pan. Heat on medium heat 15 minutes or until heated through completely. Serve with crackers or pita triangles. Serves 6 to 8 as a snack.

Deep Dish Wild Turkey Pot Pie

1 pound boneless, skinless wild turkey breast, cut into 1-inch pieces
¼ cup light zesty Italian dressing
4 ounces cream cheese,

2 tablespoons flour
½ cup reduced sodium chicken broth
1 package (10 ounces) mixed vegetables, thawed
1 refrigerated pie crust (½ of 15-ounce package)

Preheat oven to 375° F. Cook turkey in dressing in a large skillet on medium heat for 2 minutes. Add cream cheese; cook and stir until melted. Add flour and mix well. Add broth and vegetables; simmer 5 minutes. Pour mixture into a deep dish 10-inch pie plate. Arrange pie crust over filling and flute edges. Cut four slits in crust to allow steam to escape. Bake 30 minutes or until crust is golden brown. Makes 4 servings.

Apple-Pear-Date Salad

1 apple halved, cored and diced
2 pears halved, cored and diced
1 cup dates, quartered
1 cup celery, chopped
½ cup walnuts, crumbled
½ cup mayonnaise
1 tablespoon honey
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 teaspoon grated lemon peel

Toss diced fruit with celery and nuts. Combine remaining ingredients and toss with the apple-pear-date mixture. Chill thoroughly. Makes 6 servings.

Strawberry Shortcake

½ cup orange juice
1 tablespoon cornstarch
2 cups frozen whole strawberries, partially thawed, quartered
¼ cup sugar
1 tablespoon orange marmalade
6 prepared biscuits
1 tub (8 ounces) frozen non-dairy whipped topping, thawed

Stir orange juice into cornstarch in medium saucepan. Add strawberries, sugar and marmalade. Bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat to low and cook 2 minutes, stirring or until sauce thickens. Cool or chill. Split open prepared biscuit. Spoon strawberry glaze over biscuit. Add a spoonful of whipped topping and biscuit top. Spoon additional glaze and whipped topping over biscuit. Repeat with remaining biscuits. Makes 6 servings.

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE OUTDOOR CATALOG

2007 Limited Edition Virginia Wildlife Collector's Knife

Our 2007 Collector's knife has been customized by Buck Knives. This classic model 110 folding knife is 8 1/2" long when fully opened and has a distinctive, natural woodgrain handle with gold lettering. Each knife is individually serial numbered and has a mirror polished blade engraved with a fox. Our custom knife comes in a solid cherry box with a collage of foxes engraved on the box cover.

Item #VW 407

\$90.00 each (plus \$7.25 S&H)



2006 Virginia Wildlife Collector's Knife

This year's knife has been customized for us by Buck Knives. Each knife is individually serial numbered, and comes with a distinctive rosewood handle and gold lettering. This year's knife also includes two white-tailed deer etched on the blade. This custom knife not only comes with a leather sheath, but also a custom made solid, cherry box with a decorative wildlife scene engraved on the cover.

Item #VW-406

\$85.00 each



2005 Virginia Wildlife Collector's Knife

This year's knife has been customized for us by Buck Knives and has a cut out blade of a hunter and his dog. Each knife is individually serial numbered and comes with a distinctive rosewood handle and gold lettering. This custom knife comes in a decorative solid cherry box with a hunting scene engraved on the cover.

Item #VW-405

\$75.00 each



To Order Visit the Department's Web Site at:
www.HuntFishVA.com or call (804) 367-2569
Please allow 3 to 4 weeks for delivery.



Virginia Nongame Wildlife Program

Celebrate the 26th Anniversary of Virginia's Nongame Wildlife Program by helping to support essential research and management of Virginia's native birds, fish and other nongame animals.

If you are due a tax refund from the Commonwealth of Virginia, you can contribute to the Virginia Nongame Wildlife Program by simply marking the appropriate place on this year's tax checkoff, on the Virginia State Income Tax Form.

If you would like to make a cash donation directly to the Virginia Nongame Wildlife Program using a Visa or MasterCard, you can visit the Department's Web site or mail a check made out to: Virginia Nongame Program and mail it to Virginia Nongame Program, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104.

Remember, that this is the year that you can make a difference by helping to support the management of Virginia's wildlife.

Nongame Tax Checkoff Fund

2008 Kids 'n Fishing Photo Contest

Contest Rules:

- ◆ Children in the picture must fall into one of the following age categories when the picture is taken: 1-5, 6-9, or 10-12.
- ◆ Photos should not be more than one year old. Photos must be taken in Virginia. Only one photo per child featured as subject.
- ◆ Photos must be postmarked no later than **June 21, 2008**. The location where the picture was taken, plus the name, address, age, and phone number of the child featured must accompany the photograph. Prizes will be sent directly to the winning children.
(Please do not write on the back of the photographs.)
- ◆ When in a boat, kids must be wearing a life jacket.
- ◆ You must submit a Photo Contest Release Form along with your photograph. Check www.HuntFishVa.com for details.
- ◆ Send entry to 2008 Kids 'n Fishing Photo Contest, VDGIF, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104.



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For Virginia Wildlife subscription calls only 1-800-710-9369
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